

Transformation: Findi

Story and Photo by SSG John Valceanu



AS soon as Army Chief of Staff GEN Erik Shinseki announced his plan for transforming the Army, rumors began to run rampant. The Army was going to get rid of all its tanks, according to one such rumor. Another held that the light infantry divisions were going to disappear. People panicked. People started arguing.

The Army is changing. But no one knows what kind of equipment it will use or how it will be organized 20 or 30 years from now, said MG James Dubik, deputy commanding general for transformation, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. Dubik is stationed at Fort Lewis, Wash., where he is overseeing the creation of the Army's two new interim brigades.

"The world has changed from the days of the Cold War. Our heavy armor helped us win that war, but now

we're seeing different types of missions that call for different types of units," Dubik said. "We want to build the new units on a common platform. This will be a fuel-efficient vehicle that will be sustainable and reliable. And we're also looking for something we don't have today: the protection and firepower of armored vehicles with the rapid deployability of light forces."

Dubik said that rapidly deployable forces such as the 82nd Airborne Division and ranger battalions give the Army the best forced-entry capability in the world. American heavy forces, built around the 70-ton M1 Abrams tank, are also second to none. What Army leaders are currently seeking to develop, however, is a medium force that can bridge the gap between heavy and light assets.

"We're not replacing the mecha-

nized forces and we're not replacing the light forces," Dubik said. "Instead, we're looking for the best way to augment what we have and provide a capability we currently lack. We want to increase the Army's mobility and lethality."

Army leaders do not currently know whether the vehicle that will finally be used as the platform for the new medium brigades will be wheeled or tracked, he said. The demonstration held at Fort Knox, Ky., last December and January helped show the Army what industry has to offer. Both wheeled and tracked vehicles were demonstrated. The Source Selection Evaluation Board this spring will feature wheeled and tracked vehicles, and it will help determine which vehicle will be the platform vehicle.

"We don't know if the vehicle that

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gets picked will be wheeled or tracked,” Dubik said. “But we want to buy the best.”

Army leaders owe it to the soldiers who will be using the vehicles to ensure that the best vehicle is chosen, Dubik said. That means picking a vehicle that provides a high level of protection while allowing soldiers a high level of battlefield mobility.

“We want a vehicle that will allow our soldiers to do their job and come back safely,” Dubik said. “We also want to buy a fuel-efficient vehicle that operates on a common platform and uses a smaller variety of weapons systems.”

Sustainability and reliability are also factors considered by Army leaders, Dubik said.

Both wheeled and tracked vehicles were demonstrated at Fort Knox and are being considered for use in the medium brigades.

“We want a vehicle that can be picked up and moved quickly, and one that will not have a huge logistics platform,” Dubik said. “The Army Vision asks us to be able to hit the ground 96 hours after notification. We can’t do that if we need to bring along all kinds of maintenance personnel. We need a platform that will be reliable and sustainable.”

In an age of relative peace and limited defense budgets, finding funds to buy the best vehicle for the job will be difficult. But Dubik says leaders will not compromise on quality.

“We’re not going to take any risks with the lives of soldiers,” Dubik said.

“At the same time, we’re very mindful of being good stewards of the money of the American people.”

MG B. B. Bell, commander of the U.S. Army Armor Center and Fort Knox, echoed Dubik’s sentiments.

“We owe it to the men and women wearing the Army uniform to empower them with the most effective equipment and the best warfighting machines available,” he said. “Ultimately, soldiers are going to win in this deal. The new organizations and equipment will give them the ability to quickly overcome the enemy.”

The new medium brigades and vehicles will be particularly useful for protecting troops and giving them the lethality they may require during peacekeeping or humanitarian operations in areas that have the potential to turn hostile, Dubik said.

“The addition of these new units to the Army sends a clear message to our adversaries and potential adversaries: We will defeat you any place, under any conditions,” Dubik said. □